Spinoza's *Compendium*: Between Hebrew and Latin Grammars of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Verbs versus Nouns

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on several Jewish and Latin grammars from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Spinoza sought to uncover the universal cognitive value of Hebrew to gain access to its logical and grammatical structure. Although the *Compendium grammatices linguae Hebraeae* was apparently intended to shed light on the central themes of *the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*), rather than the metaphysics of *Ethics*, I will examine the thesis proposed by several researchers who have highlighted the similarity between the linguistic categories of the *Compendium* and the conceptual categories of the *Ethics.* I will attempt to understand how, by projecting the characteristics of Latin onto Hebrew, Spinoza made the noun primordial in relation to the verb and ultimately neglected the dynamism of Hebrew.[2] Then, I will attempt to test the comparison proposed by some commentators between the transformational character of Hebrew as identified in the *Compendium*, and Noam Chomsky's theory of generative grammar. Finally, I will emphasize, in opposition to Spinoza's defense of the primacy of the noun, the fundamentally verbal and dynamic nature of the Hebrew language.

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Concerning the *Compendium,* I follow the Latin edition of *Benedicti de Spinoza Opera, vol III.* Ed. Carl H. Bruder (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1846), since this editor divided the text into sections. For Spinoza's other works, I follow the Universitätsbuchhandlung, Bd. Carl Gebhardt, *Baruch de Spinoza Opera* (Heidelberg/Carl Winter, 1925). All translations from Latin, Hebrew, and Dutch into English are mine unless otherwise stated.

[2]I underline that from a pragmatic point of view, it is necessary to distinguish between the notion of *name* and that of *noun*, cf. Laura Delgado, "Names vs nouns," *Philosophical Studies* 179, no. 11 (2022): 3233–3258. Names, especially when they are proper names, show how language connects to the world, while nouns are more about categorization and conceptual structure. Although in Hebrew there is no difference between the two concepts, which are referred to interchangeably by the term "shem," Spinoza's use of the term 'nomen' is more akin to noun than name. Indeed, the title of Chapter V of the *Compendium*, "De nomine," is generally translated into English as "Of the noun." Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza's Complete Works* first edition, ed. M. L. Morgan, Trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 599. I generally use the term *noun*, but depending on the context I also use the term *name*.

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SPINOZA, THE CHRISTIAN HEBRAISTS, AND THE HEBREW GRAMMAR

THE *COMPENDIUM GRAMMATICES LINGUAE HEBRAEAE*, written by Spinoza for his circle of students, was published in 1677 in the *Opera Posthuma,* in a hasty and uncritical manner, and the text still requires some numerous corrections.[3] According to Jarig Jelles, the *Compendium* was to have two parts, the first dealing with *etymology* and the second with *syntax,* but the latter was never written.[4] This work has been described as fundamentally eclectic, for example, on the one hand, it describes the pronunciation of consonants in the manner of the Portuguese," whom he calls Lusitanians (*Lusitani,* living in the southwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula), such as *debarav* (his words).[5] But on the other hand, it reports the pronunciation of vowels according to the Ashkenazim, as described by Buxtorf I (1564–1629), notably transcribing the vowel *shureq*,[6] whereas the Sephardim pronounce it *shuruq*.

In general, Spinoza expressed a dual and contradictory point of view. He criticized the failure of Biblical accents to represent affections through signs (*signis indicare*).[7] However, in line with Buxtorf I, he devoted an entire chapter (chapter IV) to accents, which only concern the reading of Biblical text. He thus contradicted his claim to want to write a grammar of the Hebrew language and not of Scripture.[8] While he had access to traditional Jewish teaching on Hebrew grammar, he also echoed the anti-Jewish attitude of Christian Hebraists, particularly supporters of the Reformation, such as Michael Servetus (1511–1553),[9] Buxtorf I,[10] and the Catholic

[3]Nathan Porges, "Spinozas *Compendium* der Hebraischen Grammatik," in *Chronicon Spinozanum* IV (1924–1926), 126; Omero Proietti, "Emendazioni alla Grammatica Ebraica Spinoziana," *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 65, no. 1 (2010): 25–56.

[4]Jarig Jelles, *Praefatione Editoris*, Bruder, 275.

[5]Spinoza, *Compendium* III, Bruder, 283.

[6]The *Compendium* reports this pronunciation, in particular, in chapter III, 283. This pronunciation is listed by J. Buxtorf I, *Thesaurus grammaticus linguae sanctae hebraeae, duobus libris. methodice propositus* (Basel: I. Helvetiorum, 1609), 12. See A. J. Klijnsmit, "Some Seventeenth-century Grammatical Descriptions of Hebrew," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 12, no. 1 (1990): 93; A. J. Klijnsmit, "Spinoza Over Taal," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 19, no. 1: (1985): 26.

[7]Spinoza, *Compendium* IV, Bruder, 286–287. Buxtorf I devoted chapter V of his *Thesaurus* to accents: *Accentu & Notatione*, 26.

[8]Spinoza, *Compendium* VII, Bruder, 301; G. González Diéguez, "Spinoza and the Grammar of the Hebrew Language," in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Y. Y. Melamed (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), 483.

[9]S. G. Burnett, "Calvin's Jewish Interlocutor: Christian Hebraism and Anti-Jewish Polemics during the Reformation." *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 55, no. 1 (1993): 121–122.

[10]J. Buxtorft I, *Juden Schul* (Basel: S. bastian Henricpetri, 1603), 572–573.

Church, which opposed the Judaization of Protestant Christians, and the spread of Kabbalah.[11]

The Spinozist *Compendium* must be placed within the context of the renewed interest in the Hebrew language that emerged during the Renaissance,[12] particularly with Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), considered the father of Hebrew studies among Christians,[13] and, with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), the promoter of Christian Kabbalah.[14] It should also be noted that this renewed interest in Hebrew was accompanied, at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, by the commencement of a secularization process. This led to the development of secular Hebrew poetry, particularly in Italy, where several Jewish scholars began to teach initially to Christian students and then in non-religious institutions.[15] The secularization of Hebrew was further accentuated by the expansion and promotion of vernacular languages, to the detriment of Hebrew, as can be seen among Italian Jews during the Renaissance.[16] At the beginning of the humanist movement, Christian Hebraists sought to compare Hebrew with other languages.[17] In general, many humanists questioned the *Hebraica veritas,* and the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries saw the emergence of an entire body of secular exegesis of the Bible.[18]

Several themes developed in the *Compendium* seem to be linked to the debates that animated Medieval Jewish grammarians.[19] Spinoza owned the works of two Jewish grammarians, the *Sefer Diqduq* by R. Mosheh Qimḥy (1129–1190) and that of R. Eliah Levita (1469–1549), *Sefer ha-Diqduq,* in its Latin translation, *Grammatica Hebraea,* by Sebastian Münster, and republished in Basel in 1543.[20] His library also contained four of the main works of Johannes Buxtorf I the Elder (1564–1629): *Biblia sacra Hebraica & Chaldaica* (1620); *Tiberias, sive, Commentarius Masorethicus triplex* (1620); *Thesaurus grammaticus linguae sanctae Hebraeae;* and by

[11]François Secret, "Notes sur les hébraïsants chrétiens [II]," *Revue des études juives* 124, no. 1–2 (1965): 157–177; S. G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660): Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 272–273.

[12]S. Kessler-Mesguish, "L'hébreu chez les hébraïsants chrétiens des XVIe et XVIIe siècles," *Histoire Épistémologie, Langage* 18, no. 1 (1996): 87–89.

[13]S. A. Hirsch, "Johann Reuchlin, the Father of the Study of Hebrew among Christians," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 8, no. 3 (1896): 445–470.

[14]Johann Reuchlin, *De Arte Cabalistica* (Haguenau: Thomas A. Anselm, 1517). On the Kabbalistic sources of Pico, see B. C. Novak, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Jochanan Alemanno," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982): 125–147.

[15]A. B. Rhine, "The Secular Hebrew Poetry of Italy," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1, no. 3 (1911): 341–402.

[16]R. Bonfil, "Changing Mentalities of Italian Jews Between the Periods of the Renaissance and the Baroque," *Italia* 11 (1994): 61–79.

[17]S. Kessler-Mesguish, "L'hébreu chez les hébraïsants chrétiens des XVIe et XVIIe siècles," *Histoire Épistémologie, Langage* 18, no. 1 (1996): 94.

[18]Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation vol. II*: *From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 159.

[19]Isaiah Teshima, "Spinoza and the Medieval Dispute on Hebrew Grammar Among Jewish Scholars," *Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan* 41, no. 1 (1998): 110–124. Article in Japanese, preceded with an English summary.

[20]R. E. Levita published his grammar book *Ha-Baḥur 'o Diqduq 'Elyahu* in Rome in 1518. Sebastian Münster translated this work into Latin and published it in Basel in 1525.

Johannes Buxtorf II the Younger (1599–1664): *Lexicon Chaldaicum, Talmudicum et Rabbinicum* (1639).[21] In addition, it should be noted that two influential rabbis from the Talmudic institution that Spinoza had attended had each written a treatise on Hebrew grammar. The first, R. Menasheh ben Israel (1604–1657), describing the properties of Hebrew in his work *Safah Brurah* (originally written in Portuguese), and R. Itshaq Aboab (1605–1693) in his book *Mel'eḵet ha-diqduq.* These two works were never published, but their manuscripts were found in the *'Eç Ḥayym* library of the Amsterdam community, where Spinoza was able to consult them before his excommunication in 1656.[22] Regarding the usefulness of writing additional Hebrew grammars, Irene Zwiep recalls that in 1655, Johannes Leusden, professor of Oriental languages in Utrecht, noted that there were "almost more Hebrew grammars than there were weeks in a year."[23] Given such abundance, why did Spinoza feel the need to write a new Hebrew grammar? In fact, Spinoza's relationship with Hebrew was primarily philosophical rather than grammatical. His project, which was to establish the "universal knowledge (*universalem huius linguae cognitionem*) of the Hebrew language,"[24] can be explained primarily by the influence that Latin scholastic thought had on several Medieval Jewish grammarians.[25] I should point out that although I use the term influence, which is of astrological origin, my use of it is closer to that of affinity proposed by William Sacksteder.[26] Such influence seems to have begun with R. Itsḥaq ben Mosheh Ha-Levy (Profiat Duran, 1350–1415), who, having been forcibly converted to Christianity, knew Latin. If he posited, as Spinoza would later do, the primacy of the noun over the verb (*ha-shem munaḥ r'ishon . . . we-'aḥaraw ha-po'el*), he did so from the point of view of syntactic usage and not from an ontological point of view. The noun does not change through its use (*ha-shem l'o mishtaneh miçad ha-shymush*), whereas the verb expresses syntactic movements (*ḥydush ha-miqreh betenu'ah*).[27]

It should be noted that the universal philosophical approach to Hebrew also stems from the work of Spanish Catholic scholars of Hebrew and Jewish origin, such as Fray Luis de Leon (1527–1591) and José de Acosta (1540–1600).[28] For the

[21]On the authority of Johannes Burdorf I in sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, concerning Hebrew studies and Judaism, see S. G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden, Brill, 1996), 7–34.

[22]A. Offenberg, "A Mid-Seventeenth-Century Manuscript of the (Unpublished) Hebrew Grammars of Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac Aboab da Fonseca Recovered," *Zutot* 4 (2003): 98–107.

[23]I. E. Zwiep, "This is not a Grammar: Spinoza's *Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*," in *Spinoza, philosophe gramairien: Le Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*, eds. J. Baumgarten, I. Rosier-Catach, and P. Totaro (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2019), 161.

[24]Spinoza, *Compendium* VIII, Bruder, 304.

[25]Raymond Lulle, and A. Llinares (Eds.), *Evast et Blaquerne.* French translation (Paris: PUF, 1970), 146.

[26]W. Sacksteder, "How Much of Hobbes Might Spinoza Have Read?" *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (1980): 25–39.

[27]R. Profiat Duran, *Ma'aseh 'Efod.* Reprint, ed. Kohn Friedlandler (Vienna, 1865), 33. In fact, in Hebrew, morphological variation results from a change that takes place in the verbal system. See L. Laks, "Why and How do Hebrew Verbs Change their form? A Morpho-thematic Account," *Morphology* 23 (2013): 351–383.

[28]K. A. Kottman, "Fray Luis de Leon and the Universality of Hebrew," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (1975): 298 and 303.

purposes of the Counter-Reformation, they sought to demonstrate the primacy of Hebrew in order to legitimize the hermeneutic role of the Church as the sole guardian of the traditional rules of scriptural interpretation. They also aimed to identify the linguistic and universal foundations of knowledge in general. Thus, for Fray Luis Leon, Hebrew nouns allow us to grasp the exact nature of things through clear linguistic representation. He emphasized that this language itself is the bearer of a great truth (*grande verdad*), because the meaning of a Hebrew noun is immanent (*en su significación*) and identical to what the thing named contains in its essence (*la cosa nombrada contiene en su esencia*).[29] Hebrew nouns are the only genuine means of representing things directly.[30]

Did Spinoza know the works of these conversos?[31] We have no proof of this, but it is likely that they were circulating among the Marranos of Amsterdam, for whom Hebrew grammar had a special significance, linked in particular to their resistance to the ban on Jewish literature by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition.[32]

The universalist conception of Hebrew seems to have strongly influenced the language theories of Hobbes, for whom the fact that this language ignores the *copula* makes it possible to understand that Hebrew nouns are intimately connected to the things. They allow thus to avoid the metaphysical question of essences that originates in the verb "to be."[33] The Port Royal grammar also took a keen interest in Hebrew semantics, in which, unlike other languages where the noun that is governed is changed," in Hebrew, it is the governing word that is changed."[34] Similarly, although he did not believe that Hebrew was the primordial language of humanity, Leibniz expressed great interest in this language, because its study allows for a deeper study of the Bible.[35]

Spinoza displayed a fundamental ambivalence toward Hebrew. On the one hand, as Geneviève Brykman points out, he considered it "the language *par excellence*,"[36] so much so that Jakob Klatzkin, the first translator of the *Ethics* into Hebrew (1924), asserted that when Spinoza had difficulty expressing his thoughts

[29]Fray Luis de León, *De Los Nombres de Cristo* (Reprint, e-artnow [1583] 2014), 19 and 39.

[30]Karl A. Kottman, "Fray Luis de Leon and the Universality of Hebrew: An Aspect of 16th and 17th Century Language Theory," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (1975): 297–310 at 307.

[31]On the possible connections between Fray Luis de Leon and Spinoza, see L. Espinosa Rubio, "Spinoza et Fray Luis de Leon: Deux Styles, Deux Sagesses," *Studia Spinozana* 16 (2008): 67–84.

[32]Miriam Bodian, "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: The Ambiguous Boundaries of Self-Definition," *Jewish Social Studies, New Series* 15, no. 1 (2008): 67.

[33]Thomas Hobbes, *Decameron Physiologicum, or, Ten Dialogues of Natural Philosophy* (London: W. Crook, 1678), 14; Thomas Hobbes, "An Answer to Bishop Bramhall," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes* vol. IV (London, J. Bohn, 1811), 304.

[34]A. Arnauld and C. Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée.* Second Edition (Paris: Bossange et Masson, 1810), 285.

[35]See D. J. Cook, Harmut Rudolph, and Christoph Schulte (eds.), "Leibniz: The Hebrew Bible, Hebraism and Rationalism," in *Leibniz und das Judentum* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008), 135–153.

[36]G. Brykman, *La judéité de Spinoza* (Paris, Vrin, 1973), 123.

in Latin, he formulated them in Hebrew.[37] Indeed, Hebrew literature constituted the primary source of his knowledge of philosophy.[38]

The *Compendium* aims to develop a grammar of Hebrew that is no longer that of Scripture, but one that would be reconstructed immanently according to a purely natural method.[39] Thus, according to the *Preface* to *the Opera Posthuma,* Spinoza wanted to study Hebrew in a *more geometrico* way (*Hebraeam grammaticam, more geometrico demonstratam*).[40] Such a project was in fact a revival of the geometric grammar (*Geometriae Grammatica*) mentioned by Gerardus Vossius (1577–1649),[41] who himself had introduced the notion of *analogia* for the study of language, in order to understand "these internal questions of letters, syllables, analogies of words, and structures" (*ad interiora illa de literis, syllabis, vocum analogia, et strutura accedam*).[42] Spinoza took up this notion of *analogia* in the *Compendium* in order to bring to light what can be deduced regularly in language (*ex analogia linguae sequutur*).[43] It should also be noted that the concept of analogy was applied to the study of language by Spinoza's contemporaries such as Adriaen Verwer (1655–1717) and Jean le Clerc (1657–1736), and was later taken up by Lambert ten Kate (1674–1731), Tiberius Hemsterhuis (1685–1766), and Albert Schultens (1686–1750).[44]

THE DESACRALIZATION OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

All these reminders help us understand that Spinoza's relationship with Hebrew was deeply paradoxical in that, while using commentators which remained attached to the sacred tradition of the Bible, for which Hebrew expresses the very structure of Being, he simultaneously sought to desacralize it.[45] While specifying that it was impossible to have a perfect (*perfectam*) knowledge of Hebrew,[46] Spinoza argued that Scripture was composed by men speaking different dialects. Therefore, according to Spinoza, Hebrew is no different from other languages, and then it is nevertheless

[37]Y. Klatzkin, *Baruch Spinoza, Hayyav, Sifrayv, Shitato.* 2nd Edition (Tel Aviv: A. Y. Stybel, 1933), 105; Gideon Katz, "In the Eye of the Translator: Spinoza in the Mirror of the *Ethics*' Hebrew Translators," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2007): 58.

[38]H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), I, 12.

[39]Z. Levy, "Ba'yat ha-normatyvyut beQyçur ha-diqduq 'Ivry leSpinoza." *Byqoret Uparshanut* 13–14 (1979): 237–238.

[40]Jelles, *Praefatione Editoris. Compendium,* Bruder, 275.

[41]G. Vossius, *De Arte Grammatica. Libri Septem* (Amsterdam, G. Blaev, 1635), 3.

[42]G. Vossius, *De Arte Grammatica. Libri Septem,* 2. The subtitle of this work is "De vocum analogia et anomalia." On the importance of the concept of analogy for the study of Hebrew in the seventeenth century, see A. J. Klijnsmit, "Vossius, Spinoza, Schultens: The Application of *Analogia* in Hebrew Grammar," *Helmantica* 51, no. 154 (2000): 139–166.

[43]Spinoza, *Compendium,* XXV, Bruder, 377.

[44]G. H. Jongeneelen, "Spinoza's Semantics: Semantic Change and the Semantics of Spinozism," *Lexicon Philosophicum* 11 (2001): 111–128.

[45]D. Lemler, "L'Abrégé de grammaire de Spinoza," in *Spinoza, philosophe grammairien: le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae,* eds. J. Baumgarten, I. Rosier-Catach, P. Totaro (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2019), 211–212.

[46]Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), VII, 12, G. III, 107 (*TTP*).

possible to identify what "this language has in common with others" (*haec lingua hoc commune cum reliquis habuerit*).[47] He even believed that studying it should make it possible to remedy the stylistic variations of the prophets, who presented themselves both as "elegant, concise, severe, coarse, verbose, and obscure" (*esse elegantem, compendiosum, severum, rudem, prolixum, et obscurum*).[48] Although Spinoza agreed with the thesis of the *Grammatica Hebraea* by R. Eliah Levita (1469–1549), whose work he owned, he never quoted this author. However, it seems likely that he read the book by Louis Cappel, who, referring to R. Eliah Levita, opposed Buxtorf's thesis on the antiquity of vowels and accents, which Cappel traced back to the 10th century, attributing them to the Masoretes of Tiberias.[49] Similarly, Spinoza asserted the lack of authority of the Masoretic signs concerning vowels (*vocales)* and accents (*accentibus)*, which were added later.[50]

Let us recall a few points of convergence between several Christian Hebraists and Spinoza. One of these points concerns the thesis of Gerardus Vossius who, like Spinoza, rejected the primacy of Hebrew. Vossius believed that "the Hebrews corrupted the manuscripts" (*Hebraeos codices corruperint*), and that "the language of the Hebrews is itself the Chaldean" (*linguam Hebraeorum ipsam esse Chaldaicam*).[51] Spinoza also took up certain themes from Goropius Becanius (1518–1572), who also denied the primacy of Hebrew (*Hebraeam priman esse negat*), describing this language as being corrupted (*Hebraicae linguae corruptelam*).[52] Becanius argued that Hebrew had been transformed by scribes, who, at the same time, had given it the status of the language of creation in a mystifying way. Let us note that, in the same vein, Leibniz considered that the Teutonic had retained more of the naturalness of

[47]Spinoza, *Compendium*, II, Bruder, 282.

[48]Spinoza, *TTP,* II, 9, G. III, 34.

[49]L. Cappel, *Arcanum punctuationis revelatum, sive diatriba depunctis vocalium et accentuum apud Hebræos verâ et germanâ antiquitate:* in lucem edita by Thoma Erpenio (Leiden: Maire, 1624), 12 and 181.

[50]Spinoza, *TTP,* VII, 13, G. III, 108. Spinoza owned the edition of *Grammatica Hebraea,* translated into Latin and republished in 1543 in Basel by Sebastian Münster (1488–1552). The latter, in accordance with what R. Eliah Levita wrote in his work *Masoret ha-Masoret* (Basel, 1539, electronic pagination, 46), asserts that the vowels and accents were added by the traditional Masoret (*traditionem Masoreth. Grammatica Hebraea,* Secunda oration, electronic pagination, 624–625 and 629. However, R. Eliah Levita's thesis has been contested, notably by R. Ḥayym Yoseph David Azulai (Ḥid'a) (1724–1806), who emphasized the antiquity of the vowels and accents (*Shem ha-Gedolym,* IX, Reedition [Wilna, 1853], 86). On the influence of Christian Hebraists on the anti-traditionalist conception of R. Eliah Levita, see D. Aranoff, "Elijah Levita, 'A Jewish Hebraist,'" *Jewish History* 23 (2009): 17–40. It should be noted that the Talmud (*Nedarym* 37b), without mentioning vowels, describes accents (*ta'amyn*) well before the Masoretic codification of Tiberias in the tenth century by R. Aaron ben Asher and R. Mosheh ben David ben Naftaly. Isidore Harris, "The Rise and Development of the Massorah. Part I," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1, no. 2 (1889): 128–142; Isidore Harris, "The Rise and Development of the Massorah. Part II," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1, no. 3 (1889): 223–257.

[51]Gerardus Vossius, *De Arte Grammatica. Libri Septem* (Amsterdam: apud G. Blaev, 1635), 12, 26, 38. Jonathan I. Israel highlighted Vossius' influence on Spinoza regarding the questioning of the sacred nature of Hebrew (*Spinoza, Life and Legacy* [Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2023], 1078–1079). On Vossius' approach to Hebrew, see A. J. Klijnsmit, "Gerardus Joannes Vossius on Hebrew," *Studia Rosenthaliana.* 32, no. 1 (1998): 8–23.

[52]Goropii Becani, *Hermathena* (Antwerpiae: Christophorus Plantinus, 1580), I, 3; IX, 219.

the Adamic language than Hebrew and Arabic.[53] In a way that remains to be clarified, such a theoretical perspective inaugurated the process of substitution, which would take shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of Hebrew by Sanskrit as the true language of *Paradise.*[54] It should be remembered that Friedrich Schlegel, who had taken up Spinoza's notion of "substantia infinita,"[55] was one of the promoters in Germany of the study of Sanskrit as a language capable of supplanting Hebrew as the original language.[56]

THE METAPHYSICAL PROJECT OF THE *COMPENDIUM*

According to Spinoza, many works have been written on the grammar of Scripture, but none truly concerned the grammar of the Hebrew language (*plures sunt, qui Scripturae, at nullus, qui linguae Hebraeae grammaticam scripsit*).[57] However, it should be noted that R. Mosheh Raphael Aguilar (1611–1679), who headed the *Talmud Torah* of the Jewish Community of Amsterdam, was himself a grammarian of the Hebrew language, and not only of Biblical Hebrew. In 1660, he published a work entitled *Epitome da Grammatica Hebrayca* in Leyden*,* which was republished the following year under the title *Compendio da Epitomo Grammatica.* Like all grammars produced by members of the Jewish Community of Amsterdam, R. Mosheh Raphael Aguilar's grammar was written in Portuguese.[58] It should also be noted that, insofar as Spinoza makes no reference whatsoever to post-Biblical Hebrew, he seems to have written only a grammar of the Bible.[59] In this sense, Spinoza takes up certain themes from the traditional conception of the Hebrew language. He thus recalls, in accordance with the Kabbalists, that "the vowels are the soul of the letters (*vocales literarum. animae appellantur*).[60] Similarly, he finds useful the division of Hebrew letters by grammarians into "five classes: guttural, labial, dental, lingual, and palatal" (*gutturales, labiales, dentales, et in literas linguae et*

[53]G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), III, II, 1 (*NE*).

[54]M. Olender, *Les Langues du Paradis. Aryens et Sémites: un couple providentiel* (Paris: Gallimard-Le Seuil, 1989).

[55]F. Schlegel, *Transcendentalphilosophie* (*Jena* 1800–1801). Reedition, Michael Elsässer (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1991), XXVI.

[56]F. Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (Heidelberg: Verlag Mohr und Zimmer, 1808); cf. A. F. J. Remy, *The Influence of India and Persia on the Poetry of Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1901), chap.VI. It has been shown that many of Spinoza's concepts are consistent with those of Hindu *Vedanta*. See Noah Forslund, "Spinoza The Hindu: Advaita Interpretations of The Ethics." Dianoia: *The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College* 5 (2018). https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/dianoia/article/view/10461/9017

[57]Spinoza, *Compendium* VII, Bruder, 301.

[58]See A. J. Klijnsmit, "Amsterdam Sephardim and Hebrew Grammar in the Seventeenth Century," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 22, no. 2 (1988): 144–164.

[59]A. J. Klijnsmit, *Spinoza and Grammatical Tradition* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 5, 9, and 156.

[60]Spinoza, *Compendium* I and II, Bruder, 279 and 282. Thus, for example, the commentary *'Or haganuz* on the *Sefer Ha-Bahyr* specifies that vowels are to letters "as the soul is to the body" (Sefer Ha-Bahyr, *ke-neshamah beguf*. Reedition [Wilna: Ram, 1883], 5a).

palati), as set out in the *Sefer Yeçyrah.*[61] Spinoza also links the role of vowels to musical practice, particularly that of the flute: "the vowels are the sound of music; the letters are the holes touched by the fingers" (*Sonus namque fistulae vocales illius musicae sunt, foramina vero digitis pulsata eius literae*).[62] This connection echoes the relationship between Hebrew vowels and music in prophetic Kabbalah.[63] Finally, Spinoza's presentation of the absence of the present, perceived solely as a point (*tempus praesens veluti punctum*), marking both the end of the past and the beginning of the future, had been developed by grammarians such as R. Yona ibn Jannah (990–1050).[64]

According to Omero Proietti, the *Compendium* drew on the work of R. Dunash Ibn Labrat (920?–990), a grammarian who, after R. Saadia Gaon (882–942),[65] has developed a comparative philology between Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic.[66] He also studied the exchange of letters within each of these languages,[67] and the classification of verbs by R. Mosheh Qimḫy(1127–1190).[68]

However, the *Compendium* was not intended as a grammar in the sense that his contemporaries understood it, because in addition to its philosophical aim, which I will analyze later, it favored usage over norms, and function over meaning. Spinoza sought to recapture the purely internal characteristics of language, based on the geometric model of the *Ethics,* attempting to present a purely immanent analysis of Hebrew. In this sense, it has been pointed out that the *Compendium* aimed to expound Hebrew grammar *more geometrico,* revealing its orderly and deductive movement.[69] However, Spinoza also referred to external considerations. Thus, he

[61]Spinoza, *Compendium* II, Bruder, 279. There are five phonological groups identified by *Sefer Yeçyrah* II, 3, including dental (5 sounds), lingual (5 sounds), labial (4 sounds), palatal (4 sounds), and guttural (4 sounds) that correspond to 22 phonemes.

[62]Spinoza, *Compendium* II, Bruder, 279.

[63]On the relationship between Hebrew vowel points and musical notes, see M. Idel, "Music and Prophetic Kabbalah," *Yuval* 4 (1971): 158 and note 36.

[64]Spinoza, *Compendium* XIII, Bruder, 337. R. Yonah ibn Jannah describes the present as now (*'atah*), set as a boundary (*gvul*) or point (*nequdah*) between the past and the future (*Sefer Ha-Riqmah*. Reprint [Frankfurt: D. Goldberg, 1856], 3). Giovanni Licata cites as Spinoza's source Buxtorf's remark that the infinitive does not designate any definite time and is called *maqor* (source) in Hebrew (*Infinitum tempus est, in quo nullu certum tempus definitur, et Hebreis dicitur Maqor, fons*); J. Buxtorf, *Thesaurus,* 95; Licata, "La nature de la langue hébraïque chez Spinoza," 55–56.

[65]Cf. A. Maman, *Comparative Semitic philology in the Middle Ages: from Sa'adiah Gaon to Ibn Barūn* (*10th–12th c.*)*.* English translation (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 16.

[66]R. Dunash Ibn Labrat, *Teshuvot. 'Im haḳra'ot Rabeynu Ya'aqov Tam* (London: Tsevi Pilipawsky, 1855), 6–9. On the camparatism of R. Dunash Labrat, see I. 'Eldar, *Letoldot torat ha-lashon ha-'ivryt beymey ha-beynayym: ha-'eskolah ha-'andelusyt* (Jerusalem: Ha-'Aqademyah lelashon ha-'Ivryt, 2014), 26.

[67]A. Maman, *Comparative Semitic philology in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 289–295.

[68]R. Mosheh Qimḫy, *Sefer diqduq.* Pesaro, 1508; I. 'Eldar, *Letoldot torat ha-lashon ha-'ivryt be-eymey ha-beynayym: ha-'eskolah ha-'andelusyt,* 5–144.

[69]On the *more geometrico* aim of *the Compendium,* see H. Santiago, "O compêndio de gramática hebraica de Espinosa é uma obra more geometrico demonstrata?" *Trans/Form/Ação* 36 no. 2 (2013): 23–44. According to H. A.Wolfson, the geometric style of *the Compendium* remains purely pedagogical. Spinoza did not indicate any link between this work and his own philosophical work, but the *Compendium* project can nevertheless be compared to that of R. Profiat Duran who, in chapter 9 of his *Ma'aseh 'Efod,* attempted to compare the relationship between adjectives, verbs and nouns to that between accidents and substance (Wolfson, *Spinoza,* I, 54–55). I believe that most of the works on the *more geometrico* character of *the*

sought to understand the relationship between language and the world, as well as the linguistic impact of cultural mediations, explaining the role of the presumed mentality of speakers in the formation of Hebrew. He took up Maimonides' thesis, which had first been presented by Plato and Aristotle, on the conventional nature of nouns.[70] Maimonides, referring to Adam's imposition of names (*Genesis* II, 20), thus shows that languages, in accordance with Aristotelian theory, are conventional and not natural (*leshonot heskemyym l'o tiv'yym*).[71]

However, Maimonides does not equate the conventional nature of Hebrew with pure arbitrariness. He emphasizes that this language is called the holy language (literally: language of holiness: *lashon ha-kodesh*), because it does not contain (*l'o hunaḥ*) terms that openly refer to sexuality or other bodily needs, and this absence characterizes the language as modest.[72] However, following Hobbes, Spinoza opposes all Adamicist theories of language and defends a purely arbitrary conception of the sign.[73] In moving from the notion of convention to that of arbitrariness, he saw in the arbitrariness of names proof that the Hebrew language remains largely anthropomorphic (*rebus omnibus humana attributa dare*), and that the Hebrew language is thus no different from other languages.[74] Spinoza noted that it is undoubtedly true that, in Hebrew as in all other languages, "later usage has made many words obsolete and outdated" (*multa obsoleta et antiquata posterior usus fecerit*).[75] From a strictly grammatical point of view, Spinoza justifies, in a historical-anthropological manner, the causative "hyf'iyl" as reflecting the Hebrews' habit of referring everything to primary causes (*ad causam principalem referre*), as being part of Providence.[76]

Compendium, especially those published after Wolfson's book, contradict this thesis, with the exception of those by G. Licata, which we discuss below.

[70]This is the thesis defended by Hermogenes, who posits that names are instituted by agreement or custom (νόμῳ) (Cratylus 385e). Aristotle, without referring to Cratylus, also maintains that a name (ὄνομα) is a sound (φωνὴ) that is significant according to agreement (κατὰ συνήκην) (*De Interpretatione,* II, 16a 20–21).

[71]Maimonides, *Guide* II, 30, 238. Maimonides' thesis has been contested by several Jewish thinkers, notably Kabbalists such as R. Abraham Abulafia, who argued that Hebrew is the mother of all languages (*'em kol ha-leshonot*. *Sefer Mafteḥot Ha-Ḥokmot* [Jerusalem: A. Gross, 2001], 60). These thinkers conceived of Hebrew as a natural and non-conventional language. See M. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia.* English translation (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 11–14.

[72]Maimonides, *Guide,* III, 8, 249. Spinoza refers to Maimonides' remark, without however mentioning his name, in *TTP,* IX, 19, G. III, 124. On Maimonides' conception of Hebrew, see in particular M. Kellner, "Maimonides on the 'Normality' of Hebrew," in *Judaism and Modernity: The Religious Philosophy of David Hartman.* ed. J. Malino (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 413–444. Criticizing Maimonides, Nahmanides and Rytb'a (R. Yom Tov Asvyly, 1165–1225) emphasized that Hebrew is by no means conventional, since it is the language in which God speaks to the prophets. Nahmanides, Commentary on *Exodus* 30:13 (Rytb'a, *Sefer ha-Zikaron,* ed. Kalman Kahana, Jerusalem, 1956), 52a–b. These authors opposed this standardization of Hebrew, which in fact constitutes its desacralization, due to the excess of Maimonidean rationalism, which notably neglects the esoteric aspect of Hebrew. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that Adam's imposition of names was prophetic and not arbitrary, cf. Y. Y. Zilberberg, *Leshonynu ha-qedushah* (Bney Braq, 1963), 14.

[73]Spinoza, *Ethics* II, 18, scholium; Hobbes, *De Corpore* I, II, cf. M. Lærke, "Spinoza's Language," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no. 3 (2014): 534, note 78.

[74]Spinoza, *Compendium* V, Bruder, 295; D. Lemler, "L'Abrégé de grammaire de Spinoza," in *Spinoza, philosophe grammairien: le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae,* eds. J. Baumgarten, I. Rosier-Catach, and P. Totaro (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2019), 218–219.

[75]Spinoza, *TTP* IX, 18, G. III, 138.

[76]Spinoza, *Compendium* XII, Bruder, 336.

Similarly, according to the *Compendium,* the origin of grammatical gender can be traced back to the tendency of people, particularly the Hebrews, to personify nature. The proliferation of homonyms is justified by the fact that the Hebrews were not concerned with avoiding ambiguities (*vitanda amphibolia)*.[77] Spinoza innovated by proposing neologisms and a new classification of the parts of speech in Hebrew.[78] However, as Warren Zev Harvey points out, he offers some interpretations that are bold, fascinating, but also often controversial and eccentric, even erroneous.[79] Spinoza also believed that he was the only person who truly understood Hebrew. For example, after adopting a scriptural interpretation from Rashi and rejecting that of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, he added that the latter did not "know the Hebrew language so well" (*qui linguam Hebraicum non adeo exacte novit*),[80] even though R. Abraham Ibn Ezra is considered one of the greatest Hebrew grammarians of the Middle Ages.[81] Spinoza also believed, according to Harvey, that he could rewrite the text of the Bible in a clear manner.[82]

In general, Spinoza opposes traditional interpretations of both the Hebrew language and the Biblical text. He criticizes the authors of the Bible for using "the future tense indiscriminately for the present and the past, and conversely the past tense for the future" (*promiscue tempus Futurum pro Praesenti et Praeterito, et contra Praeteritum pro Futuro*).[83] By suggesting that it is possible to elegantly supply (*elegantia suppleri*) these deficiencies of tense and mood with specific rules derived from the principles of language.[84]

While the essential originality of the *Compendium* concerns its classification of verbal forms, it nevertheless mentions infinitive forms that are not attested, such as *huf'al* verbs. Spinoza points out, for example, that even though there is no infinitive with a double vowel *qamaç* in Scripture*,* "I do not doubt that this infinitive form existed in Hebrew, as well as all those I have mentioned" (*non tamen dubito, quin Hebraei hanc et omnes, quas dixi, infinitivi formulas habuerint*).[85] But Spinoza also

[77]Spinoza, *Compendium* XI, Bruder, 331.

[78]J. Gruntfest, "Spinoza as a Linguist," *Israel Oriental Studies* 9 (1979): 117.

[79]W. Z. Harvey, "Spinoza Metaphysical Hebraism," in *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy,* eds. H. M. Ravven and L. E. Goldman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 108–110.

[80]Spinoza, *TTP,* Annotation 1 of chap. I, G. III, 251.

[81]L. R. Charlap, *Torat ha-lashon shel Rabbi Abraham Eben Ezra. Masoret we-ḫydush* (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 1999), 5.

[82]Harvey, "Spinoza Metaphysical Hebraism," 109.

[83]Spinoza, *TTP,* VII, 12, G. III, 107. Regarding these irregularities, Spinoza does not mention the characteristics of the prefix Waw known as "conversive" (*waw ha-hypuḫ*). When used in a verbal form in the perfect or imperfect tense, in the accomplished or unaccomplished form, it converts it into its opposite: the past into the future and the future into the past. This prefix is analyzed in particular by R. Ibn Ezra, *Meozney lashon ha-kodesh.* Reprint (Offenbach, 1791), 6a, and by R. David Qimhy, *Sefer Miḫlol.* Reedition, notes by the editor R. Itshaq Rittenberg (Leq, 1862), 7b, 100b, 111a, etc. Cyrus Gordon attempts to give a phonetic explanation for these irregularities: "The Accentual Shift in the Perfect with Waw Consecutive," *JBL* 57 (1938): 319–325.

[84]Spinoza, *TTP,* VII, 12, G. III, 107.

[85]Spinoza, *Compendium* XIV, Bruder, 342. Ph. Cassuto, *Spinoza hébraïsant: l'hébreu dans le «Tractatus theologico-politicus» et le «Compendium grammatices linguæ hebrææ.»* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 90; Harvey, *Spinoza Metaphysical Hebraism*, 108; A. J. Klijnsmit, *Spinoza and Grammatical Tradition* (Leiden,

believes that other grammatical forms do not exist in the Bible, even though they are clearly present. For example, he asserts that the infinitive *nifqad* (he was visited) "is nowhere to be found in Scripture,"[86] while it is used three times: in *Numbers* 31:40, I *Samuel* 25:7, and I *Samuel* 25:21.[87]

As I mentioned earlier, Spinoza sought to reveal the universal cognitive value of Hebrew (*universalem huius linguae cognitionem*),[88] by going beyond the limits of the Biblical text in order to access the logical and grammatical structures of Hebrew.[89] If this language was for Spinoza what François Zourabichvili called "the language of infinite understanding,"[90] then these two different types of languages both possess grammatical rules which are capable of describing the world. According to Spinoza, they both derive their specificity from the divine substance, and therefore the grammatical rules of Hebrew also belong to the laws of nature like other natural productions.[91] In this sense, Jacob Bernays was able to identify traces of the *Ethica* in the *Compendium.*[92] Steven Nadler has expressed some reservations about such a correspondence. He points out that the *Compendium* was apparently intended to shed light on the central themes of the *TTP,* and not on the metaphysics of the *Ethics*. Indeed, Spinoza's linguistic perspective, both in *the TTP* and in *the Compendium*, concerns the anthropological use of language rather than a strictly conceptual reflection.[93] However, Spinoza saw in nominality the active essence of the Hebrew language, since the noun is defined by reference to the "thing that falls under the intellect" (*sub intellectum cadit*).[94] Even though Spinoza did not indicate any correspondence between the *Compendium* and his metaphysics, this reference to the intellect seems to take up, in a strictly grammatical context, what *Ethics* I, 16 conceived from a logical and ontological point of view as "everything that can fall under an infinite intellect" (*omnia quæ sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt*).[95]

Brill, 1986), 5. As Sophie Kessler-Mesguish has pointed out, the only distinction proposed by Spinoza that is grammatically founded is ultimately that between proper nouns and common nouns (*proprium and appellativum*) (Spinoza, *Compendium* VI, Bruder, 294). S. Kessler-Mesguish, "Hebrew among Christian Hebraists in the 16th and 17th Centuries," *History, Epistemology, Language* 18, no. 1 (1996): 102 note 24.

[86]Spinoza, *Compendium,* XV, Bruder, 347

[87]This verbal form is explicitly listed in Its̲haq 'Azry'el's work, *Ma'aneh Lashon,* published in Amsterdam in 1627, which Spinoza may have consulted. R. I. 'Azry'el, *Ma'aneh Lashon* (Amsterdam: Beyt Menasheh ben Israel, 1627), 7.

[88]Spinoza, *Compendium* VIII, Bruder, 304.

[89]Cf. G. Licata, "Spinoza e la cognitio universalis dell'ebraico. Demistificazione e speculazione grammaticale nel Compendio di Grammatica Ibraica," *Giornale di metafisica* 31, no. 3 (2009): 625–661.

[90]F. Zourabichvili, « La langue de l'entendement infini », dans *Lectures contemporaines de Spinoza* dir. C. Cohen-Boulakia, P.-F. Moreau, and M. Delbraccio (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2012), 379–395.

[91]Z. Levy, "Ba'yat ha-normatyvyut beQyçur ha-diqduq 'Ivry leSpinoza," *Byqoret Uparshanut* 13–14 (1979): 222.

[92]J. Bernays, "Ueber Spinoza's hebräische Grammatik," in *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, ed. H. Usener (Berlin, Wilhelm Hertz, 1885), T.II, 350.

[93]S. Nadler, "*Aliquid remanet*: What Are We to Do with Spinoza's Compendium of Hebrew Grammar?" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 56, no. 1 (2018): 164–165. As relevant these remarks may be, they do not seem to contradict the thesis of the metaphysical model of the *Compendium.*

[94]Spinoza, *Compendium.* V, Bruder, 294.

[95]Spinoza, *Ethics,* I. 16.

For Spinoza, the noun is a real definition and not just a grammatical one. He thus subscribed to an essentialist view of the name, which can be found in particular in R. Abraham de Balmes (1440–1523) and the Maharal of Prague (1525–1609), who posited the noun as the expression of the essence (*mahut*) of the thing.[96] Spinoza's philosophical interpretation of Hebrew grammar seems to have been preceded on this point by the philosophical grammar of R. Abraham de Balmes, who valued proper names by referring them to a single substance.

THE SPINOZIST PHILOSOPHICAL-GRAMMATICAL PARALLEL

The relationships between grammatical and philosophical perspectives, regarding the concepts of substance, attribute, and mode, were developed by Spinoza's students in order to prove the primacy of the noun, which is the central thesis of the *Compendium*.[97] It seems that the origin of the grammatical-philosophical parallel between the *Compendium* and *the Ethics* goes back, *mutatis mutandis,* to the metaphysics of Suárez (1548–1617).[98] He distinguished between the *ens* as a particle and the *ens* as a noun.[99] As Stephen H. Daniel has suggested, Spinoza's concepts of substance, attribute, and modes correspond respectively to the Suarezian distinction between (1) *ens*-as-noun, (2) *ens*-as-participle, and (3) *res*. Indeed, in the *Short Treatise,* Spinoza proposes to distinguish between *wezen* (being), *zaaken* (the participial principles that make things real), and *dingen* (the things that are identified by means of such principles). Spinoza then emphasizes that the attributes (also called substances) are real things (*zaaken*), and they designate a being (*wezen*) existing through itself; and that this being therefore makes itself known through itself. The other things (*dingen*) are only modes of those attributes, and without them they can neither exist nor be understood.[100] These clarifications can then help us understand, as Erika Hültenschmidt summarizes, that it is possible to identify, in the parts of speech of Hebrew grammar, substance with the *nomen substantivum,* which is itself divided into *nomen proprium* and *nomen appellativum.* The essential attributes or properties of substance correspond to the *vox adjectiva,* while the *modi* of things are designated by participles. The *voces* that enable relationships between modes are similar to those used in relative or prepositional expressions (*relativum sive praepositivum*). Action is nominally designated by the infinitive (*nomen actionis*), while the *modi* of action and the relations between actions are designated by adverbs.[101] In this

[96]R. Abraham de Balmes, *Miqneh Abram* (Venice, 1523) Electronic pagination, 48; Maharal, *Be'er ha-golah,* V.

[97]S. Rubin, *Diqduq Sfat 'Ever.* Hebrew Translation of Spinoza's *Compendium* (Krakow: Y. Plasner, 1905), 14; N. Porges, "Spinozas *Compendium* der hebraïshen Grammatik," 146.

[98]On the influence that Suárez's metaphysics may have had on the formation of Spinozism, see C. G. Noreña, "Suárez and Spinoza: The Metaphysics of Modal Being," *Cuadernos Salmantinos de Filosofía.* 12 (1985): 163–182.

[99]Suárez, *DM.* II.4.3.

[100]Spinoza, *Short Treatise,* I, VII, G. I, 46; cf. S. H. Daniel, "Spinoza's Appropriation of the Medieval Being-Thing Distinction," *Journal of Spinoza Studies* 2, no. 1 (2023): 7–8.

[101]Spinoza, *Compendium* V, 294; VI, 295; VIII, 304; E. Hültenschmidt, "Le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza: une grammaire philosophique de l'Hébreu," in *La philologie au présent. For*

sense, Jeremias M. Hillesum related the concept of *nomen* in the *Compendium* to that of *substantia* as defined in the *De Deo.*[102] Similarly, it has been argued that the Hebrew linguistic categories of the noun (*shem ha-'eçem*), of the adjective (*shem ha-to'ar*) and of the participle (*beynony po'el*) served as models for the philosophical concepts of substance, attribute and mode, respectively.[103] Thus, for example, the attribute "wise" is similar to the attribute of thought of a particular individual, and the attribute "great" corresponds to his attribute of extention. Similarly, the mode "knowing" appears as a mode of that individual's thought, and "walking" as a mode of his extension.[104] Even if the parts of Hebrew speech are not themselves substances, attributes, and modes, we can nevertheless assume that, from a Spinozist point of view, the characteristics of this language can express these metaphysical concepts.[105]

However, Martine Pécharman has shown that the grammatical monism of the *Compendium*—every word is a noun—developed from a confusion between two types of cognitive processes that classical grammars, particularly that of Port Royal, had taken care to distinguish. According to Port Royal, we must differentiate between what we conceive in relation to the object of our thought, and the way we think through the operations of our mind. The first procedure is called "proposition," and it concerns nouns in particular, while the second is called "judgment" and it expresses the movements of the soul through verbs.[106] Spinoza, however, confuses the mental process of *conception* with the mental process of *affirmation.* He indeed stated that: "There is no volition in the mind, that is, no affirmation or negation, except that which is contained in the idea as idea " (*In mente nulla datur volitio sive affirmatio et negatio præter illam quam idea quatenus idea est, involvit*). And then he posits the equivalence between the will and the intellect (*Voluntas et intellectus unum et idem sunt*).[107] Whereas, according to Descartes, in order to judge, it is necessary to associate the understanding with the will (*Non solum intellectum, sed etiam voluntatem requiri ad judicandum*),[108] Spinoza denies both human will and the free power to suspend judgment (*negando nos liberam habere potestatem judicium suspendendi*).[109] The illusion of suspending judgment is nothing more

Jean Bollack, eds. C. König, and D. Thouard (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010), 101–102.

[102]J. M. Hillesum, "De Spinozistische Spraakkunst," *Chronicon Spinozanum* 1 (1921): 171.

[103]E. Hültenschmidt, *Le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza,* 98 and 102; Harvey, "Spinoza Metaphysical Hebraism," 110; Y. Y. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31. It should also be noted that Olli Koistinen gives the mode of substance an adverbial status ("Towards an Adverbial Theory of Spinoza's Modes," *Res Cogitans* 10, no. 1 [2015]: 111).

[104]A. J. Klijnsmit, *Some Seventeenth-century Grammatical Descriptions of Hebrew,* 93–94.

[105]E. Hültenschmidt, *Le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza,* 100–102

[106]A. Arnauld and C. Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée,* 269.

[107]Spinoza, *Ethics* II, 49; and Corollary. M. Pécharman, "Loin de Port-Royal: le statut linguistique de l'hébreu dans le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza," in *Spinoza, philosophe gramairien: Le Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae,* eds. J. Baumgarten, I. Rosier-Catach, and P. Totaro (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2019), 272 and note 128.

[108]Descartes, *Principia philosophiae*, I, § 34, AT, VIII, 18.

[109]Spinoza, *Ethics* II, 49, Scholium.

than an inadequate perception of things, and in no way expresses the capacity of a subject to judge freely. Actually, all affirmations and negations remain intrinsic to the idea that they envelop, insofar as they are ideas (*quam idea quatenus idea est, involvit*).[110] It can be stated that the two procedures mentioned by the *Grammar of Port Royal*, that Spinoza did not differentiate are semantically related to the extensional and intensional orders, respectively. Indeed, the proposition, centered on the noun, has an objective referent and is therefore referentially transparent, while the judgment, using a verb, connotes the subject's mental attitudes, thus implying intensional contexts that are always opaque.[111]

The *Grammar of Port Royal* emphasizes the metalinguistic function of the verb: "we do not speak only to mark what we conceive, but to express what we think of what we conceive, which is marked by the verb."[112] Having canceled the duality of the noun and the verb, due to the monism of substance expressed in the nominal monism, Spinoza leaves no room for metalanguage. Indeed, the geometric style of the *Ethics* prohibits the use of a metalanguage that would explain and justify the deductive process in a way that would be external to the chain of its axioms and propositions.[113]

The Port Royal's thesis thus calls into question Spinoza's conception of the Hebrew grammar. This thesis points out that, in Hebrew, the verb is "almost always implied,"[114] and contrary to Spinoza's notion of idea, which alone is capable of affirmation, it is the verb that affirms. This enables us to maintain the distinction between the object of our thought and the operations of our mind, in opposition to Spinoza's identification of the mind with the idea (*ideam sive mentis*).[115] It is through this distinction, which is common to all languages, that Hebrew belongs to linguistic universality, whereas Spinoza attempted to eliminate such a distinction.[116] This analysis allows us to understand the reasons for Spinoza's secondary status of the verb in relation to the noun, whereas the verb precisely expresses, as I will show later, the dynamism of the Hebrew language.

The excessive valorization of nouns by Spinozism, which "govern the genitive or are governed by the genitive" (*genitivum regit, vel a genitivo regitur*),[117] has been strongly criticized because it excludes verbs from the parts of speech.[118] As I have

[110]Spinoza, *Ethics* II, 49.

[111]On the importance of extensional and intensional procedures in the formation of Spinozism, see J. J. Rozenberg, *Spinoza, le spinozisme et les fondements de la sécularisation* (Amazon, 2023), 38–39.

[112]A. Arnauld and C. Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée,* 378.

[113]A. Wasser, "Spinoza and the Claims of Meaning: 'A Word to the Wise,'" *Diacritics* 47, no. 2 (2019): 109; M. Lin, "Spinoza on the Metaphysics of Thought and Extension," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza.* ed. D. Garrett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 113–140.

[114]A. Arnauld and C. Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée,* 331.

[115]Spinoza, *Ethics* II, 49, scholium.

[116]M. Pécharman, "Loin de Port-Royal: le statut linguistique de l'hébreu dans le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza," in *Spinoza, philosophe gramairien: Le Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae,* eds. J. Baumgarten, I. Rosier-Catach, and P. Totaro (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2019), 271–272.

[117]Spinoza, *Compendium* VIII, Bruder, 312.

[118]E. Hültenschmidt, "Spinoza's Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae," 103; Z. Levy, "Ba'yat ha-normatyvyut beQyçur ha-diqduq 'Ivry leSpinoza.'" *Byqoret Uparshanut* 13–14 (1979): 235.

just pointed out, this over-valorization is based on an underlying correspondence, not mentioned by Spinoza, and which has been contested by some commentators, between the *Compendium* and *Ethics,* seeking to base Hebrew grammatical notions on his metaphysics.[119]

One might think that the nominal monism of the *Compendium* is contradicted by Spinoza's assertion that all Hebrew nouns "are formed according to verbal model" (*ex verborum formulis formantur*).[120] However, as Zev Levy points out, this statement in no way implies that nominal forms are derived from verbal dynamism, but merely aims to clarify that nouns undergo the same grammatical transformations as verbs. For Spinoza, nominal forms always remain primordial,[121] and verbs (*verba*) are only conjugated "infinitive nouns" (*nomina infinitiva*). He specifies that the infinitive is a "pure and simple noun" (*purum putum nomen*),[122] and its verbal aspect remains secondary in regard to the noun.[123]

On this point, it is possible that Spinoza retained the semantic remark made by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, who linked the term designating the name (*shem*) to that of the place (*sham*, there) (*shem migzerat sham*).[124] This remark may have given Spinoza the idea of comparing the noun to the spatialized substance that supports its accidents. However, from a grammatical point of view, R. Abraham Ibn Ezra emphasizes also the derivation of the name from the verb (*yesh 'eçem shenigzar mipa'al*). Thus, Abraham's son was named *Itsḥaq* (literally: he will laugh), because his 89-year-old mother and his 99-year-old father laughed (*wa-yçḥaq*) when they heard the promise of the meta-natural birth of a son.[125]

THE LATIN MODEL OF THE NOUN AND SPINOZA'S *COMPENDIUM*

R. Abraham de Balmes seems to have had an indirect influence on Spinoza, who, like him, had undertaken to teach Hebrew to non-Jews.[126] His work on Hebrew grammar, *Miqneh Abram,* which he himself translated almost entirely into Latin under the title *Peculium Abrae,* was published in a bilingual edition by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1523, the year of his death. This treatise contributed greatly to the transition from the traditional Hebrew grammars of the Middle Ages to those

[119]This thesis has been challenged by G. Licata, who points out that Spinoza's primacy of nominal forms is deduced solely on linguistic grounds, without recourse to metaphysical considerations (G. Licata, Spinoza e la cognitio universalis dell'ebraico," 646–653). However, the purely linguistic content of *the Compendium* does not exclude the intervention of theoretical presuppositions specific to Spinozism, which seem to be at the origin of the project to write a Hebrew grammar. This is why the *Compendium* is an integral part of Spinoza's corpus. This justifies its inclusion in Spinoza's *Complete Works*, cf. S. Nadler, "*Aliquid remanet*: What Are We to Do with Spinoza's Compendium of Hebrew Grammar?," 155–167.

[120]Spinoza, *Compendium* VIII, Bruder, 304.

[121]Z. Levy, Ba'yat ha-normatyvyut beQyçur ha-diqduq 'Ivry leSpinoza. *Byqoret Uparshanut,* p.241

[122]Spinoza, *Compendium* V, Bruder, 294.

[123]Spinoza, *Compendium* XIII, Bruder, 339.

[124]R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Shem* (Fiorda, 1834), 1a; *Perush 'al Shemot* 3:15; L. R. Charlap, *Torat ha-lashon shel Rabbi Abraham Eben Ezra. Masoret we-ḥydush,* 100–101.

[125]R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Perush 'al Shemot* 3:15; *Genesis* 17:1 and 17:19.

[126]Omero Proietti, "Johannes Buxtorf, Spinoza e la sintassi dell'ebraico," *Università di Macerata, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia Annali* XLII–XLIII (2009–2010): 54.

of the humanist Hebraists of the Renaissance. He thus transposed into Hebrew concepts which are specific to the Latin language, such as the opposition between *transitivus* and *immanens* (*noded/boded*). Following the model of the organization or construction of discourse (*ordinatione sive constructione dictionum*) of Priscian (sixth century),[127] R. Abraham de Balmes devoted a chapter to the syntax (*harkavah*) of Hebrew, then introducing the syntactic analysis into Hebrew grammar.[128] In the wake of some Christian Hebraists such as Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522),[129] Konrad Pellikan (1478–1556),[130] Sebastian Münster (1488–1552),[131] and Angelo Canini (1521–1557),[132] R. Abraham de Balmes used Latin as a metalanguage for Hebrew, forging a conceptual toolkit borrowed from Latin grammar.[133] Strongly influenced by the Greco-Latin linguistic tradition, he sought to uncover the deductive foundations of the internal logic of Hebrew, thereby sketching out the premises of a general linguistics.[134] He introduced the concept of *regimen/shymush,* as being parallel to the case system of Latin declensions, distinguishing between three modes: *modos regiminis* (*darkey shymush)*, *modus compositionis* (*darkey harkavah)*, and *modi significandi* (*darkey hora'ah)*. R. Abraham de Balmes, who contributed greatly to promoting the logical and pre-modern approach to Hebrew grammar, sought to define the organization of language by moving from simple elements to compound structures. By drawing a similarity between Hebrew and the philosophical description of the universe,[135] he sought, before Spinoza, to define the bases of the normativity of the Hebrew language.[136]

Spinoza mentions the author of *Miqneh Abram* only once, as "a certain (*cuidam*) Rabbi Abraham of Balmes,"[137] but it seems without having read his writings, or perhaps a Latin version of *Miqneh Abram*, published in Hanau in 1594 under the title:

[127]Prisciani, *Institutiones grammaticae.* Libri xvii, vol. III (Lipsiae: Henrici Keilii, 1859), 108.

[128]D. Ben 'Aryeh, *Miqneh Abram le-Abraham de Balmes* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2022), 279.

[129]J. Reuchlin, *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* (Pforzheim, 1506).

[130]K. Pellikan, *De modo legendi et intelligendi Hebraeum* (Strasbourg, 1504).

[131]S. Münster, *Complete Version of the Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible*: *Accesserunt in hac secunda aeditione multae nouae annotationes; praesertim in Pentateucho, atque in multis locis textus clarior redditus: Hebraicae ueritati magis quam antea conformatus* (Basel, 1546).

[132]Angelo Canini, *De Locis S. Scripturæ hebraicis Commentaria* (Antwerp, 1600). Marie-Luce Demonet-Launay has shown that Reuschlin, Münster, and Canani contributed to the desacralization of Hebrew by asserting that it functions like other languages. M-L. Demonet-Launay, "La désacralisation de l'hébreu au XVIe siècle," in *L'hébreu au temps de la Renaissance,* ed. I. Zinguer (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 155–156.

[133]On the model of Latin in the learning of Hebrew, see M. Soulié, H. Weber, C. Longeon, and C. Mont, "L'apprentissage de l'hébreu d'après les paradigmes latins," *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la Réforme et la Renaissance* 15 (1982): 109–116.

[134]S. Campanini, "Peculium Abrae. La grammatica ebraico-latina di Avraham de Balmes," *Annali di Ca' Foscari.* XXXVI, 3, Serie orientale, 28 (1997): 20–22.

[135]On the influence of Averroes on R. Abraham de Balmes, see G. Licata, "Abraham de Balmes. Grammatico ebreo, filosofo, traduttore di Averroè," in *Coexistence and Cooperation in the Middle Ages,* eds. A. Musco and G. Mussotto (Palermon: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2014), 785–802.

[136]C. Aslanoff, "La réflexion linguistique hébraïque dans l'horizon intellectuel de l'Occident médiéval," *History, Epistemology, Language* 18, no. 1 (1996): notably 80–85, and 82 note 19.

[137]Spinoza, *Compendium.* III, Bruder, 284. Spinoza follows here the opinion of J. Buxtorf Filii, *Tractatus de punctorum vocalium, et accentuum, in libris Veteris Testamenti Hebraicis, origine, antiquitate, &*

Grammatica Hebraea una cum Latina interpretatione e regione posita.[138] However, it is likely that *Miqneh Abram* was one of the indirect sources of the *Compendium.* This work itself was part of a project that emerged during the Renaissance to establish a universal grammar. Joseph Juste Scaliger (1540–1609) and Franciscus Sanctius Brocensis (1523–1601), among others, contributed greatly to this project, aiming to identify the principles (*causae*) specific to Latin grammar.[139] Spinoza may also have been inspired by Franciscus Sanctius' *Minerva seu de causis linguae latinae*, published in 1587, and reprinted in 1664 in Amsterdam with some annotations by Gaspar Schopp Scioppus.[140] Franciscus Sanctius stated that "among the Hebrews there are three parts of speech, the noun, the verb, and the defining phrase" (*apud Hebræos tres sunt partes orationis, nomen, verbum, et dictio confignificans*).[141] He sought to compare Latin with other languages, particularly Hebrew, by assimilating adjectives to nouns.[142]

Johannes Buxtorf I developed a systematic analysis of the Hebrew language using Latin categories, and his writings had a major impact on Spinoza, who owned his main works.[143] Spinoza seems also to have found in Latin the primacy of the noun, as shown, for example, in George Dalgarno's *Ars dignorum* (1662). This author asserted that the noun system governs all parts of speech.[144] Spinoza reified grammatical categories specific to Latin and Greek (even though he did not really know the latter language) into metaphysical categories that he sought to apply to Hebrew. As Emile Benveniste will show, following Adolf Trendelenburg, the categories of Western logic merely express the categories of the Greek language, insofar as the language itself always provides the conceptual properties of thought.[145] Like the

authoritate oppositus Arcani punctationis revelato, Ludovici Cappelli (Basel, 1629), 204. Buxtorf II opposes R. Abraham de Balmes' division, noting: "disapprove" (*improbar*).

[138]R. Abraham de Balmes, *Grammatica Hebraea una cum Latina interpretatione e regione posita* (Hanau: Guilielmum Antonium 1594). Following N. Porges, A. J. Klijnsmit argued that Spinoza was familiar with *Miqneh Abram* (*Spinoza and the Grammarians of the Bible,* 160). On the other hand, S. Campani believes that Spinoza only knew *Miqneh Abram* through a quotation from Buxtorf the Younger, taken from *Tractatus de punctorum vocalium, et accentuum,* 204 (S. Campanini, "*Recensione di B. Spinoza, Compendio di grammatica della lingua ebraica*," edited and with an introduction by P. Totaro, Italian translation and notes by M. Gargiulo" *Materia Giudaica* 19 [2014]: 608). S. Campanini, "Le Peculium Abrae d'Abraham de Balmes," in *Spinoza, philosophe grammairien: le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae,* eds. J. Baumgarten, I. Rosier-Catach, and P. Totaro (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2019), 112–114.

[139]J. C. Scaliger, *De causis linguae latinae* (Lyon, 1540); F. Sanctius, *Minerva seu de causis linguae latinae* (Amsterdam, 1587); R. H. Robins, "The Future of Linguistics in the Light of its Past History," *Language Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1984): 208.

[140]Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas (Sanctius), *Minerva, sive de causis latinae linguae commentarius,* Reprint (Amsterdam: Judocum Pluymer, [1587] 1664). Spinoza owned Gasperis Scioppii's work, *Grammatica philosophica* (Amsterdam: Judocum Pluymer, 1664). As I noted above, Gasperis Scioppii had reissued and annotated Franciscus Sanctius's work *Minerva seu de causis linguae latinae.*

[141]Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas (Sanctius), *Minerva, sive de causis latinae linguae commentarius,* 9.

[142]M. Breva Claramonte, *Sanctius' Theory of Language* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1983), 202.

[143]See H. Stammerjohann, *Lexicon Grammaticorum: A Bio-Bibliographical Companion to the History of Linguistics 1–2,* Second Edition (Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2009), 703.

[144]A. J. Klijnsmit, "Some Seventeenth-century Grammatical Descriptions of Hebrew," 96.

[145]A. Trendelenburg, *Erläuterungen zu den Elementen der aristotelischen Logik* (Berlin: Bethge,1842); E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 70.

Christian Hebraists of the Renaissance, who took Greek and Latin as models for the analysis of Hebrew,[146] Spinoza transposed the rules of Latin grammar to Hebrew in order to display its normativity.[147] This is why, his terminology remains dominated by the model of Latin grammar that was prevalent throughout Europe during that time.[148] While Hebrew, like other Semitic languages, has only three cases,[149] the nominative, the genitive, and the accusative,[150] following Buxtorf I, Spinoza added the dative and the ablative.[151] Regarding Spinoza's desire to study Hebrew through Latin, it is significant that the editors of his works in Dutch did not deem it necessary to include the *Compendium* in this edition, and as justification, they merely pointed out: "Men rarely acquire knowledge of Hebrew before becoming skilled in Latin" (*dewijl men zelden tot het leren van 't Hebreeus toetreed, voor dat men de Latijnsche taal machtig is geworden*).[152]

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR OF HEBREW AND ITS VERBAL NATURE

It should be remembered that R. Saadia Gaon attempted to define the universal deep structure of Hebrew in the form of a pure language (*çaḫot*),[153] thus laying the foundations of comparative linguistics.[154] Several generative approaches to Biblical Hebrew have been proposed following the transformational grammar of Noam Chomsky, who devoted his MA thesis to the morphophonemics of modern Hebrew, emphasizing the simplicity required for the study of grammar.[155] These studies highlighted the competence-performance distinctions specific to this language, seeking to identify, in the Biblical text, the relationships between apparent surface structures and deep structures which, while remaining implicit, determine the meanings of the text. The goal of exegesis is to map these deep structures.[156]

[146]S. Campanini, "Hebrew Students and Teachers Across Borders in the Renaissance," In *Trilingual Learning. The Study of Greek and Hebrew in a Latin World (1000–1700*), eds. R. Van Rooy, P. Van Hecke & T. Van Hal (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 55–76.

[147]Z. Levy, "Ba'yat ha-normatyvyut beQyçur ha-diqduq 'Ivry leSpinoza," *Byqoret Uparshanut*, 219.

[148]A. S. Kaye, "Spinoza as a Linguist," *Hebrew Annual Review* 4 (1980): 114.

[149]M. ben Asher, "Qyçur ha-diqduq ha-'ivry leBaruḵ Spinoza," in *Spinoza–300 shanaḫ lemoto*, eds .Z. Levy and M. Strauss (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1978), 187–188.

[150]H. F. W. Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar,* 2nd ed., Trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 248–249.

[151]Spinoza, *Compendium* XI, Bruder, 334–335; J. Buxtorf I, *Thesaurus,* 76. In fact, as reported by A. J. Klijnsmit, R. Mosheh Raphael Aguilar had already noted, in his Hebrew grammar written in Portuguese, that the noun has five cases. A. J. Klijnsmit, "Some Seventeenth-century Grammatical Descriptions of Hebrew," 87.

[152]Spinoza, *De Nagelate Schriften van B. D. S.* (Amsterdam: Jan Rieuwertsz, 1677), electronic pagination, 53.

[153]I. Zwiep, "What is a Name? Conceptions of Hebrew as Reflected by the Titles of Hebrew Grammars," in *Zutot,* eds. S. Berger, M. Brocke, and I. Zwiep (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), 119.

[154]See A. Dotan, "Saadia Gaon, 'A Master Linguist,'" in *Biblical, Rabbinical and Medieval Studies,* eds. J. Targarona and A. S.Badilos (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 27.

[155]N. Chomsky, *Morphophonemics of Modern Hebrew.* Reedition (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1979), 5.

[156]D. Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis?* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1979), 38.

Similarly, a parallel has been noted between Spinoza's conception of Hebrew grammar and that of generative-transformational grammar. It should be remembered that Chomsky took up Saussure's distinction between language and speech,"[157] in the form of "intrinsic competence" and "actual performance,"[158] a distinction that Spinoza had already anticipated.[159] Indeed, the opposition noted by the *Compendium* between the oral and the written echoes that between competence and performance. For Spinoza, the oral form conveys a multifaceted richness that allows us to "express the affections of the soul that we are accustomed to manifest through speech or facial expressions" (*ad animi affectus exprimendum, quos inter loquendum vel voce vel vultu indicare solemus*). However, writing (*scripto*), which remains limited, is incapable of doing so.[160]

Furthermore, Chomsky and Spinoza similarly distinguish between deep structure and surface structure. For Chomsky, deep structure refers to the abstract form containing the information necessary to interpret the meaning of a sentence, which is then transformed into surface structure by syntactic rules.[161] For Spinoza, it is always possible to show that, at a deep, i.e., conceptual level, all words in Hebrew have the "value and properties of a noun" (*vim et proprietates nominis*).[162] He specifies that, from a superficial point of view, each part of speech belong to a specific grammatical form.[163] However, in traditional Hebrew grammar, a distinction has been made, in a generative way but opposed to Spinoza's, between the superficial structure of nominal forms and the deep structures of the basic verbal pattern of Hebrew, which is called *binyan* (construction).[164]

To clarify Spinoza's understanding of the noun's relationship to the verb, let's recall the main points of the debate between Wallace L. Chafe and Noam Chomsky, which focused precisely on these notions. Noam Chomsky seems to have generalized the Spinozist approach to Hebrew grammar, through which his father, William Chomsky, sought to prove that Hebrew verbs are derived from nominal forms.[165] Like Spinoza, Noam Chomsky misunderstood the power of verbs by deriving the

[157]F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics.* English translation (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 4–9.

[158]N. Chomsky, *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* (The Hague, Mouton, 1964), 10. However, Bruce L. Derwing has qualified the analogy between the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky, pointing out that Saussure refers to a system of interrelationships among elements, whereas Chomsky also establishes a system of rules. Bruce L. Derwing, *Transformational Grammar as a Theory of Language Acquisition: A Study in the Empirical, Conceptual and Methodological Foundations of Contemporary Linguistics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 260–261.

[159]C. Hervet, *De l'imagination à l'entendement : puissance du langage chez Spinoza* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), 371.

[160]Spinoza, *Compendium* XIX, Bruder, 386.

[161]N. Chomsky, *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory,* 30; A. S. Kaye, *Spinoza as a Linguist,* 109, note 2, 114, 116 note 16.

[162]Spinoza, *Compendium* V*,* Bruder, 294.

[163]Spinoza, *Compendium.*V, Bruder, 294.

[164]Y. Wormser, "Conceptualization of the Morpheme and the Distinction between Verbs and Nouns in Traditional Hebrew Grammars," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 64, no. 2 (2019): 448.

[165]W. Chomsky, *Hebrew Eternal Language* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1957), 188–190.

elements of language solely from nominal forms of the *subject-predicate* type.[166] He thus downplayed the role of the verb in proposition theory.[167] Wallace L. Chafe, on the other hand, argued that the verb predetermines the noun, and that what he calls the semantic structure of a sentence is built around a *central verb.* The verb determines the form of the nouns related to it, as well as the valency of the verb, which is expressed by the number of complements that relate to it. For Chafe, this structure gives the verb a determinative role, while nouns remain secondary. This role posits predicates as originally verbs, which describe states and events, while nouns generally constitute arguments, whose function is to refer to things and to abstractions after they have been reified.[168] According to Chafe, there are three main reasons for positing the centrality of the verb: first, the verb is semantically present in all sentences; second, it determines which nouns will accompany it; and third, the inflectional unity of the verb, such as tense, is imposed on the entire sentence.[169]

The Spinozist approach to Hebrew confuses the noun and its referent, thereby seeking to nullify the dynamic structure from which the noun originates, thus reducing verbal action to its nominal products. Spinoza tries to prove that attributes and modes of things are in Hebrew species of nouns. He asserts that "the infinitive, called mode in Latin, is a pure and simple noun in Hebrew" (*quem infinitivum Latini vocant, apud Hebraeos purum putum nomen sit*).[170] This is a reduction that contradicts the dynamic nature of Semitic grammars, denying the fact that, for traditional Jewish thinkers, each noun proceeds from an action (*pe'ulah,* a term derived from the root *po'el*, meaning verb).[171] On this question, R. Itshaq Profiat Duran bar Mosheh Ha-Levy clarified two points that are essential for our subject. On the one hand, as I noted earlier, if the noun seems primordial (*munaḫ r'ishon*), it is because it remains unchanged despite the functions it performs (*bilty mish-taneh miçad ha-shymush*),[172] and this is why it ignores all inflections specific to the verb.[173] But on the other hand, the Hebrew verb is at the origin of all grammatical transformations. The noun is only the vehicle for these transformations insofar as nouns are derived from the verb (*ha-shemot migzerat pa'al*).[174]

[166]N. Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics,* 3rd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 84.

[167]J. C. Pariente, "Grammaire générale et grammaire générative," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 1, nos. 5–6 (1975): 40.

[168]W. L. Chafe, *Meaning and the Structure of Language* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 10 and 96; cf. Kaye, *Spinoza as a Linguist,* 116, note 16.

[169]See W. A. Cook, *Case Grammar Theory* (Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1989), 64–65.

[170]Spinoza, *Compendium* V, Bruder, 294.

[171]R. Yosef Gikatilla, *Ginat 'Egoz* Hanau. Reedition (Jerusalem: Ha-Hayym we-ha-Shalom, [1615] 1989), 20.

[172]R. I. P. Duran Ha-Levy, *Ma'aseh 'Efod.* Reedition (Vienna, 1865), 33.

[173]C. Aslanoff, "La réflexion linguistique hébraïque dans l'horizon intellectuel de l'Occident médiéval," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 18, no. 1 (1996): 76.

[174]R. I. P. Duran Ha-Levy, *Ma'aseh 'Efod,* 51–52.

THE PRIMACY OF THE VERB OVER THE NOUN

In the *Compendium*, Spinoza seeks to show that nouns, even if they appear to derive from verbs, have a nominal value. In Chapter XVIII, he gives a decisive example which, as the French translators of this work point out, if it were to be contradicted, would refute Spinoza's entire theory of the primacy of nouns.[175] Spinoza quotes the verse from *Hosea* XI, 3, and then seeks to prove that the term "tirgalty" (literally: I have accustomed) is a noun. To do this, he relies on the authority of R. Mosheh Qimḫy (1127–1190), himself quoted by Johannes Buxtorf I.[176] The two Buxtorfs similarly translated *tirgalty* as *assuefeci* (I have accustomed).[177] Buxtorf I, and Spinoza following him, seems to have been familiar with the opinion of R. Mosheh Qimḫythrough the commentary of his brother, R. David Qimḫy (1160–1235, referred to by the acronym *Radaq*).[178] However, a careful study of R. David Qimhy's text reveals a meaning quite different from that postulated by Spinoza. R. David Qimḫypoints out that, according to traditional grammarians, notably Rashi and R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, the letter *tav* replaces the letter *he*. Therefore, *tirgalty* is a verb conjugated in the past tense *hyrgalty* (I have accustomed), and not a noun,[179] as he emphasizes elsewhere in his *Sefer Miḳlol.* In this work, R. David Qimḫy notes that the term *tirgalty* is an infinitive (*shem ha-po'el*).[180] He explains that his brother understood *tirgalty* on the model of *tifarty,* a nominal term meaning "My glory." However, he points out that *tirgalty* would have designated a noun and not just an infinitive if the accent had been placed on the last syllable. However, since the accent is on the first syllable, *tirgalty* can only be a verb, conjugated in a causative

[175]J. Askenasi and J. Askenasi-Gerson, *Abrégé de grammaire hébraïque de Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1968), 159, note 9.

[176]Spinoza, *Compendium* Bruder, 355; J. Buxtorf I, *Thesaurus Grammaticus Linguae Sanctae Hebraeae,* 133.

[177]J. Buxtorfi I, *Sefer ha-šorašim kicur. Epitome radicvm hebraicarvm hoc est, omnium thematvm, cum suis derivatis, quae in sacris Bibliis Hebraicis extant: Solida et svccincta explicatio* (Basel: Coradi, Waldkirchii, 1600), 407; J. Buxtorf II, *Concordantiae Bibliorum Hebraicae* (Basel: Ludovici König, 1632), entry: *regel,* without pagination.

[178]As I mentioned earlier, R. Mosheh Qimḫy's work, *Sefer Diqduq,* published in Pesaro in 1508, was found in Spinoza's library. Joël and Jocelyne Askénazi note that Spinoza was familiar with the writings of R. David Qimhy, whose name he mentions in the *TTP (*Ann. 19, G. III, 259). Spinoza refers to causative verbs, which appear in particular in R. David Qimḫy's commentary on *Genesis* XXIV, 23. *Abrégé de grammaire hébraïque,* 139 note 6, 199 note 21. Judith Kogel disputes this knowledge. She points out that the reference to the commentary on II *Samuel* VI, 2, in no way proves that Spinoza himself was familiar with the writings of R. David Qimḫy. She cites as evidence the fact that Spinoza did not own any books by this author and could not have known his commentary on *Genesis,* which was not published until 1842 (Kogel, *"*Spinoza, lecteur de David Qimḫy?," 93–100). However, we believe that Spinoza had read many more books than those he owned, and that he was able to consult the two famous works by R. David Qimhy, the *Sefer Miḳlol* (published in Venice in 1545) and the *Sefer Ha-shorashym* (published in Venice in 1546).

[179]R. David Qimḫy on *Hosea* 11:3; cf. Rashi and R. Ibn Ezra on *Hosea* 11:3. This conjugation is quoted by J. Buxtorf I in the passage I mentioned above.

[180]R. David Qymḫy, *Sefer Miḳlol,* 63b. On the problems raised by Spinoza's reading of R. Mosheh Qimḫy's, cf. N. Porges, "Spinozas *Compendium* der Hebraischen Grammatik," 136; S. Campanini, "Le Peculium Abrae d'Abraham de Balmes" 119.

form (*hyf'iyl*).[181] Furthermore, R. David Qimḥy notes that in the verse: "and I will glorify the house of My Glory (*tif'arty*)" (*Isaiah* 60:8), the term "tifarty" cannot be a noun, because it derives from the verb "*to glorify*," used in the future tense as first person singular (*'apa'er*).[182] As Samuel Lee (1783–1852) pointed out, regarding R. Mosheh Qimḥy's remark, the fact that a verb can sometimes take a nominal form never negates its verbal essence.[183] These traditional commentators clearly oppose Spinoza's future assertion, positing these terms as nouns, and specifying that those who "understand otherwise are completely ignorant of the text" (*Qui aliud sentiunt, textum plane ignorant*).[184] It should be noted that Spinoza's thesis that the infinitive is a "pure and simple noun" (*purum putum nomen*),[185] had been refuted in advance by early medieval Jewish grammarians. Thus R. Yehuda Ḥyug (945–1012), specified that the infinitive (*shem ha-po'el*) is described as a source (*maqor*), because it generates all verbal forms (*kol binyaney ha-po'alym*).[186]

I will highlight later the relationship between Spinozism and Karaism, but it is important to remember here that a Karaite grammarian, Aaron of Jerusalem (Abū al-Faraj, Hārūn ibn al-Faraj eleventh century), had asserted, before Spinoza, that the various categories of the verb are derived from the noun to which he assimilates the infinitive (*Masdar*).[187]

Following Spinoza, Crawford H. Toy (1836–1919) attempted to show that the Hebrew verb has a nominal base. To support this thesis, he took as an example the verse from *Proverbs* 8:21, "For I have given them their inheritance (that which exists, *yesh*)," and he then considers the term "yesh" as a noun.[188] This opinion runs counter to the traditional interpretation which, as Rashi shows about this verse, makes "yesh" a contracted verbal form of the complete expression: "I reserve (I have with Me or there is with Me) a great inheritance (for those who love Me)."[189] In the same vein, William Chomsky, seeking to prove that all Hebrew verbs are derived from nouns, gave as a key example of such derivation the verse in *Genesis* 17:11 "you shall circumcise" (*unemaltem*), pointing out that this verb is a "corrupted" form of the passive (*nif'al*), which itself derives from the noun "mol" or "malal."[190] However,

[181]R. David Qymḥy, *Sefer Miḳlol.* p.63b; R. David Qymḥy, *Sefer Ha-Shorashym.* Reprint (Berlin: G. Bethoe, 1847), 343, note 1.

[182]R. David Qimḥy, on *Isaiah* 40:7.

[183]S. Lee, "Professor Lee's Answer to Some Articles Which Appeared in the *Journal des Sçavans,* relative to Hebrew Grammar," *The Classical Journal* vol. LXXIX (September 1829): 11.

[184]Spinoza, *Compendium* Bruder, 355. Nathan Porges pointed out Spinoza's misinterpretation of R. Mosheh Qimhy's commentary (Porges, "Spinozas *Compendium* der Hebraischen Grammatik," 136).

[185]Spinoza, *Compendium* V, Bruder, 294.

[186]R. Yehuda Ḥyug, *Shloshah Sifrey Diqduk.* Hebrew translation, Reedition (London: 'Ashyr and Co.1870), 21.

[187]G. Khan, "Abu al-Faraj Hârûn and the Early Qaraite Grammatical Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 48 (1997): 318; J. Olszowy-Schlanger Judith, "Early Qaraite Grammarians and their Concept of the Hebrew 'Root,'" *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 21, no. 2 (1999): 114.

[188]C. H. Toy, "On the Nominal Basis of the Hebrew Verb," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 8 (1877): 18.

[189]Rashi on *Proverbs* VIII, 21.

[190]W. Chomsky, "Toward Broadening the Scope of Hebrew Grammar," *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* New Series, 49, no. 3 (1959): 187.

R. David Ha-Levy Segal (1586–1667, author of *Taz,* acrostic of *Turey zahav*) had already showed that this reading is not possible from a strictly grammatical point of view. He noted that this verb is not in the passive form, because the verse would then have had to be punctuated with a "ẖyryq." Following Rashi, David Ha-Levy Segal pointed out that the letter "nun" is not part of the root, which therefore designates an active verbal form and not a nominal one.[191]

As I mentioned earlier, for Spinoza, all words in Hebrew have the "value and properties of a noun" (*vim et proprietates nominis*).[192] In this sense, Ya'aqov Kletskin (1881–1932) supported Spinoza's thesis, and referred to several traditional Jewish grammarians who seem to have given priority to the noun over the verb.[193] Indeed, the noun, which is an element of stability and fixity, thus seems to have a determining status.[194] In this regard R. Yonah Ibn Jannah (990–1050), relating to Aristotle, noted that verbs are formed from their root (*ha-po'alym hem nilqaẖym mimeqoreyhem*). However, he specified that the noun itself does not generate the verb (*we-'eyn . . . a-shem mamçy' ha-po'el*), but rather that "nouns derive from verbs" (*ha-shemot ha-nigzarym miha-po'alym*).[195] Therefore, as H. F. Wilhelm Gesenius (1786–1842) pointed out, in Hebrew it is the noun that derives from the verb and not the other way around.[196]

According to the transformational perspective I mentioned earlier, the primacy of the noun over the verb only concerns the superficial structure of the utterance, whereas verbal forms remain decisive when considering their deep structure. Using scholastic language, we could say that the noun takes precedence over the verb according to the *ratio cognoscendi* of the proposition, while according to its *ratio essendi,* the verb remains first.[197] Furthermore, the question of the priority of the verb over the noun can be clarified from a theological point of view.[198]As R. Shmuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865) emphasizes, the term which in Hebrew designates the verb: "*po'el*," also means the Creator, as opposed to the creature "*pa'ul,*" a distinction which Spinoza's pantheism could not accept. He granted the noun the status of *causa sui,* in accordance with the definition of substance with which the *Ethics* begins. This is why the Spinozist noun concerns first a metaphysical definition, intended to explain the reality of things, and based on the model of the laws specific to the natural substance.[199]

[191]Taz '*al B'ereshyt* XVII, 11

[192]Spinoza, *Compendium.* V, Bruder, 294.

[193]Y. Klatzkin, *Baruk Spinoza, Hayav, Sifrayw weShytato* (Tel Aviv, Masadah, 1954), 172–173.

[194]L. R. Charlap, *Torat ha-lashon shel Rabbi Abraham Eben Ezra* (Masoret we-ẖydush), 101

[195]R. Yonah Ibn Jannah, *Sefer-haryqmah.* Hebrew translation (Frankfurt, 1856), 3–4 and 54. On the philosophical aspect of R. Yonah Ibn Jannah's grammatical theory, see A. Maman, "R. Yonah Janāḥ: Beyn Fylosofiah le-Lashon," *Lĕšonénu* 70 (2008): 351–359.

[196]H. F. W. Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar,* §§84–85, 233–239; E. Hültenschmidt, *Le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza*, 95 note 13.

[197]Cf. Bonaventura, "Collationes in Hexaemeron," in *Opera omnia* (Quaracchi, 1882–1902), 1,13, V 331b.

[198]R. S. D. Luzzatto, "Neged Spinoza, IV," in *Meẖqarey ha-Yahadut* I (Warsaw, 1913), 213.

[199]E. Hültenschmidt, *Le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza,* 101.

THE VERBAL DYNAMISM OF HEBREW

R. Hayym Hirshenzon (1857–1935) noted that Spinoza simply confused the general substance (*'eçem*) of philosophers with the noun specific to language (*shem 'eçem*), without being aware that nouns are accidental and not essential.[200] Oswald Ducrot borrowed the concept of "delocutivity" (*délocutivité*) from Emile Benveniste to highlight the semantic conditions of the overvaluation of the notion of substance.[201] Ducrot examines an example proposed by Pierre Bourdieu concerning food, and more specifically a nourishing meal described as substantial.[202] He shows that by talking about a substantial meal, we value it as a substance. In doing so, we make a shift that, according to Ducrot, would sadden Spinoza, from ordinary language, describing a hearty meal, to the philosophical term "substance." This is in fact a metalinguistic delocutive derivation, which creates the concept of substance or nature from a purely linguistic usage, that means entirely something else."[203] As I observed earlier, in relation to the grammar of Port Royal, Spinoza's secondary status of the verb results from his rejection of metalanguage. However, the notion of delocution now allows us to understand that Spinoza's metaphysical substantialism, as well as his grammatical nominalism, both proceed from a surreptitious shift from the linguistic level to a metalinguistic level. Finally, it should be noted that, according to Otto Jesperen, grammarians tend to think that the substance or substrate of various qualities is in fact pure fiction.[204]

Regarding Hebrew grammar in particular, Erika Hültenschmidt has emphasized that Spinozist priority of the noun over the verb constitutes an "act of violence,"[205] which is part of a system that rejects becoming and time. The Hebrew noun primarily concerns the relationship to verbal action.[206] Spinoza recalls the conception of the present as a point (*punctum*) between the past and the future,[207] developed by Aristotle,[208] and then taken up by J. Buxtorf I.[209] However, it presents a static approach to temporality, contrary to the Jewish grammarians of the Middle Ages, who distinguished between three tenses: the past (*quatal*), the present (*qotel*), and the future (*yqtol*). This is why R. David Qimhy, for example, affirmed the existence of the

[200]R. H. Hirschensohn, *Musagy Shaw we'Emet* (Jerusalem, 1942), 98 and 118.

[201]E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Reedition (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 277. According to Benveniste, a verb whose semantic value is derived from the meaning of the phrase, i.e., from the semantic value of its enunciation, is delocutive. The essence of delocutivity lies in the fact that a semantic value involves a discourse activity. Cf. F. Plank, "Delocutive Verbs, Crosslinguistically," *Linguistic Typology* 9, no. 3 (2005): 459–491.

[202]P. Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), 221–222. In this work, Bourdieu, who was a Spinozist sociologist, refers twice to Spinoza, on 251 and 334.

[203]O. Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit* (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1984), 125–127.

[204]O. Jesperen, *The Philosophy of Grammar.* Reedition (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1935), 134–135.

[205]E. Hültenschmidt, *Le Compendium grammatices linguae hebraeae de Spinoza,* 95.

[206]B. Rojtman, *Feu noir sur feu blanc. Essai sur l'herméneutique juive* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1986), 205 note 66.

[207]Spinoza, *Compendium* VIII, Bruder, 337.

[208]Aristotle, *Physics* IV, 13.

[209]J. Buxtorf I, *Thesaurus Grammaticus Linguae Sanctae Hebraeae,* 92–96.

present tense (*zman howeh*), without establishing it as a boundary between the past and the future.[210] Hebrew considers an action to be either completed or uncompleted. As a result, beyond the distinction between the present, the past, and the future, we are only dealing with a completed or uncompleted action, the former expressing a past action and the latter a future action. Verbal tenses do not express a temporal opposition between the past, present, and future, but only forms of completion or incompletion of the action.[211] Temporality does not concern an order of succession, but the manner in which the action was accomplished, either in an unfinished mode (the imperfect) or in a finished mode (the perfect).[212] In this sense, as Marcel Cohen suggested, Semitic verbs do not express time but the degree of completion of a process, thus radically contrasting with the status of verbs in European languages. For the latter, the distinction between what has happened and what has not yet happened is subjective: "it only makes sense for the speaking subject who conceives of time in an abstract way, as a condition of an ideal line, and draws divisions in relation to himself: what is behind him (at the moment he speaks), the past; what is in front of him at that precise moment, the present; what is ahead of him, the future."[213] On the contrary, in Hebrew, verb tenses express objective modalities of action that are not determined by the subject's dispositions. However, in Classical Hebrew, there is an equivalent of the present tense that uses the active participle to express the present continuous, a state of continued activity."[214]

This is why Hebrew verbs do not have verbal modes that depict our psychological dispositions towards verbal action, but describe only objectively resolved or unresolved volitional modes.[215] As a result, Biblical Hebrew prohibits the formation of Propositional Attitudes, which mediate the relationship to reality through the speaker's mental structures.[216] Hebrew describes only the objective forms of action that are or not actually produced.[217] These remarks therefore raise problems for the anthropological investigation of *TTP.* Indeed, one of the aims of this work was to uncover, through the language of the Bible, the real thoughts of Biblical persons, particularly the prophets, by attempting to reconstruct their subjective dispositions, i.e., their Propositional Attitudes.[218]

Even if they are no longer explicitly related to the actions they describe, participles cannot be isolated from them without falling into a form of illegitimate

[210]R. D. Qymḥy, *Sefer Miḳlol,* 12.

[211]J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 80.

[212]S. R. Driver, A *Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 3–5.

[213]M. Cohen, *Le système verbal sémitique et l'expression du temps* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1924), V, and 13.

[214]J. Weingreen, A *Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew.* 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 66.

[215]F. D'Olivet, *La langue hébraïque restituée: L'Âge d'Homme,* Reedition (Lausanne, 1991), 122.

[216]S. E. Boër, "Propositional Attitudes and Compositional Semantics," *Philosophical Perspectives* 9 (1995): 341–380.

[217]See J. J. Rozenberg, "Discours, sémantique et argumentation selon la tradition talmudique," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 10, no. 1 (1988): 29–42.

[218]Spinoza, *TTP* II, 3, G. III, 30; *TTP* II, 6 and 7, G. III, 32; *TTP* II, 13, G. III, 37.

abstraction. Malbym (R. M'eyr Leybush ben Myḵal Weisser, 1809–1879) points out that the verb (*po'el,* term which is derived from the root *pa'al,* to operate) always refers to an action (*ma'aseh*) in the process of being carried out, and the action itself represents the finished product of the verbal activity.[219] This is why the transposition into Hebrew of the verbal system specific to Latin leads, on the one hand, to a chronogenesis responsible for a spatialization of time and, on the other hand, to the position of the present as a reified state.[220] In fact, Spinoza was aware of the risks of reification of the participle as an attribute, cut off from the relations to the time of the action it originally designated. He notes, for example, that the term *sofer,* meaning a man: "that is, who is busy counting at this moment," and he adds that this term is often used as an attribute without any relation to time.[221] However, the priority of the noun over the verb, which he sought to promote, constitutes a negation of the temporality and dynamism of reality.

What has been called Spinoza's "nominalism,"[222] determines his analysis of the Hebrew language in a fundamentally static way, that excludes becoming and temporality in favor of an ahistorical eternity. On the contrary, for the Jewish tradition, eternity is expressed in time and history.[223] Charles Sanders Peirce saw in Spinoza's nominalism a negation of the dynamism inherent in reality, with the grammatical consequence of the secondary status of the verb.[224] According to Emmanuel Levinas, the adjective, although nominalized, always remains a product of the verb, which then designates itself as a noun. It is the verbality of the verb that resonates in the predicative proposition, because the verb expresses the dynamism of beings, while the noun reifies a particular action among all possible actions.[225] Hebrew, like Arabic and the other Semitic languages, proceeds from a linguistic dynamism relating what we pose as substance, to action. Its logic thus opposes statism and therefore any reification.[226]

Although he was unable to complete his project of reconstructing Hebrew grammar in a *more geometrico* manner, as I mentioned above, Spinoza remained convinced that only such a perspective could provide access to the true text of the

[219]Malbym, *Sefer ha-Karmel* (Sighet, 1900), 275.

[220]G. Guillaume, *Temps et verbe. Théorie des aspects, des modes et des temps suivi de L'architectonique du temps dans les langues classiques* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1984), 25, 29.

[221]Spinoza, *Compendium,* Bruder, 400.

[222]See L. C. Rice, "Spinoza's Nominalism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (1994): 19–32.

[223]R. J. D. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 118, which refers to Spinoza. On Spinoza's relationship to historicity, see G. Boros, "Spinoza and the Metaphysics of History," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 54, no. (1992): 70–86; M. A. Rosenthal, "Spinoza and the Philosophy of History," in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays,* ed. C. Huenemann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 111–127. Ernst Cassirer emphasized the opposition between the ahistorical metaphysics of the *Ethics* and the historical analysis of the Bible developed by the *TTP,* while maintaining that a historical truth remains a *contradictio in adjecto.* E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment.* English translation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951), 185.

[224]Ch. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Eds. C. Hatshorne and P. Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931–1935), V, 81.

[225]E. Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence.* Reedition (Paris: LGF, 1990), 68.

[226]J-C. Vadet, "The Primacy of Action over Being and Essence, the Guiding Principle of Al-Aš'arī's Logic?" *Studia Islamica* 44 (1976): 46, 53 note 1.

Bible. He recognized that the Hebrew language bears witness to an uncorrupted (*incorruptam*) tradition handed down by the Jewish people concerning the meaning of words, because "no one has ever had any interest in changing the meaning of a word" (*nemini unquam ex usu esse potuit alicujus verbi significationem mutare*).[227] However, Spinoza rejected any credit to the Jewish oral tradition and, following the model of the Karaite grammarians, sought to establish an immanent theory of the Hebrew language, whose logic must be found in Scripture alone, a reading that would be developed in particular by Protestant theology.[228] Indeed, *Sola Scriptura,* claimed as the method of interpreting the Bible, was supposed to allow for an immanent study of its language.[229]

However, the Karaite grammarians were confronted with a paradox. On the one hand, they claimed to be able to grasp the meaning of the Bible without resorting to any external data, but on the other hand, these grammars openly drew on the heritage of the Jewish Masoretes.[230] It should be remembered that R. Abraham Ibn Ezra had denounced the Karaite approach to the Bible and its language. He showed that, in order to understand the Hebrew language and its grammar correctly, it is necessary to refer to the transmission (*mesorah*) and reception (*qabalah*) of the grammatical rules specific to the Tradition.[231] Following on from my previous remark regarding the convergence between Spinoza's conception of the infinitive and that of the Karaite grammarian Abū al-Faraj Hārūn ibn al-Faraj, we can highlight at least two points of convergence between Karaism and Spinozism. First, the relationship that has been established between Christian Hebraists, whose influence on the formation of the *Compendium* I have shown*,* and the Karaites. According to Daniel J. Lasker, "For Protestants in particular, Karaism was considered a Protestant form of Judaism as compared to Phariseeism (Rabbanism), which they deemed to be Catholic."[232] Second, the figure of Uriel da Costa (1585–1640), who claimed to be a Karaite,[233] had a significant impact on Spinoza. Uriel Da Costa was twice excommunicated for

[227]Spinoza, *TTP,* VII, 9, G. III, 105.

[228]Spinoza, *TTP* VII, 21, G. III, 101; A. E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction.* 3rd Edition (Oxford, Blackwell, 1999), 9–11. It should be noted that the Protestant reading, according to *sola scriptura,* was largely determined by traditional Jewish commentaries on *the Pentateuch.* The work of Nicholas Lyra (1270–1349) *Postilla litteralis super Bibliam,* published in Strasbourg in 1472, had a profound influence on Martin Luther, introducing him to Rashi's (1040–1105) commentaries in particular. See D. Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). See, for example, 6 and 125.

[229]Spinoza, *TTP* VII, 21, G. III, 101.

[230]G. Khan, "Introduction," in *The Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought in its Classical Form: A Critical Edition and English Translation of al-Kitab al-Kafi fi al-Lugha al- `Ibraniyya by Abu al-Faraj Harun ibn al-Faraj*, vol. 1, eds. G. Khan, M. A. Gallego, and J. Olszowy-Schlanger (Leiden: Brill, 2003), XX–XXII.

[231]R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Haqdamah laTorah.* On the development of Karaite hermeneutics of the Bible, see M. Polliack, "çmyḥatah shel parshanut ha-Miqr'a beqerev ha-Qar'aym," *Sefunot* 7, no. 22 (1999): 299–311.

[232]D. J. Lasker, "Karaism and Christian Hebraism: A New Document," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2006): 1096.

[233]U. Da Costa quoted by C. Gebhardt, *Die Schriften des Uriel Da Costa* (Amsterdam: M. Hertzberger, 1922), I. Sonne, "Da Costa Studies," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 22, no. 3 (1932): 281.

rejecting himself the oral law and rabbinical canons of Judaism, and for denying the soul's immortality.[234] Like the Karaites and Protestants, Spinoza remained dependent on the achievements of Jewish grammarians and traditional Bible commentators.

CONCLUSION

I began by pointing out the historical parallels that can be drawn between the project presented by Spinoza in the *Compendium grammatices linguae Hebraeae* and the theses developed by certain Jewish and Christian Hebrew grammarians of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Through the analysis of these parallels, I attempted to understand the roots of the secularization of Hebrew. I then sought to clarify the controversial question of the theoretical relationship between the *Ethics* and the *Compendium.* Thus, by comparison with the *Grammaire Générale et Raisonnée* of *Port Royal,* I then attempted to uncover the foundations of a possible correspondence between *the Ethics* and the *Compendium*. I thereafter emphasized Spinoza's projection onto Hebrew of categories specific to the Latin language. I afterwards examined the relationship between Spinoza's analysis and that of generative and transformational grammar, by recounting the debates between Wallace L. Chafe and Noam Chomsky concerning Spinoza's thesis on the prevalence of the noun and the verb. Finally, I stressed, against the primacy of the noun defended by Spinoza, the fundamentally verbal and dynamic nature of the Hebrew language.

[234]C. Gebhardt, *Die Schriften des Uriel Da Costa,* XXXIII–XL; Y. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Volume 1: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 7 and 50–51.